News release

Questions and Answers on the weather this week

24 November 2005

Q. What is happening with the weather across the UK in the coming days?
A. The change to a cold northerly straight from the Arctic is now under way. This will make it feel much colder and bring the possibility of snow to most areas.

Q. What areas are affected?
A. The feel to the weather will be the big thing. With a strong northerly wind developing it will be bitterly cold. All parts of the UK could see some snow through the coming days, although the snow showers will affect certain areas more than others. Northern and eastern Scotland look like getting the worst of the weather, but forecasters are also predicting heavy snow showers for Wales, Northern Ireland, and south-west England. Blizzard conditions may exist for a time over higher ground.

Q. How much snow are we talking about?
A. Around 15 cm could fall over high ground, but with strong winds giving blizzard conditions, widespread drifting of the snow is likely. At lower levels, where many of us live, a covering of snow is possible anywhere, with two to five centimetres in the worst-affected areas.

Q. What do you mean by worst-affected areas?
A. The areas most at risk are northern and eastern Scotland, with the worst of the conditions extending down through the Irish Sea to affect Northern Ireland, Wales and the south-west of England through Friday.

Q. What will the temperature be?
A. Temperatures have remained low this week with widespread night-time frosts. For Friday, temperatures will be no higher than 4 or 5 °C. With the strong north wind, it will feel more like -5 to -10 °C in many places through the country.

Q. What advice are you giving?
A. The Met Office works with other agencies and Government to help mitigate the effects of the cold weather. Individuals should always check the latest weather forecast on the Met Office web site or through the media. It's also very important to check the up-to-date travel conditions.

Q. Is this the start of the cold winter that you have been forecasting?
A. It is certainly consistent with the 'colder than normal winter' that we said has a 65% chance of occurring this year. This blast of cold northerly and easterly winds, rather than the usual mild Atlantic air, is the sort of pattern we expect to occur more frequently this winter. There will be milder interludes in coming weeks, but these are not expected to be as prolonged as in recent winters. A cold winter is not based on one cold snap. It does depend on how many there are and how long the cold periods last. Having such a cold snowy spell over much of the UK this early is certainly unusual, but it is too early to confirm our predictions for the winter as a whole.

Q. Does this mean a cold snowy Christmas?
A. It is far too early to say. It is possible that Christmas could coincide with a milder interlude and it is foolish to forecast daily predictions from a cold winter signal. At best we will be able to give some guidance concerning Christmas about 7 to 10 days ahead.

If you or your business is likely to be affected by the weather this week, continue to check out the Met Office web site or call Weathercall for a detailed forecast for your area.

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